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Gregg Tries to Shield Iran-Contra File

Former Bush Aide Seeks to Keep Results of Failed Polygraph Secret

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Donald Gregg, the U.S. ambassador to South Korea who in the 1980s was a high-ranking aide to then-Vice President George Bush, is seeking a court order to prevent disclosure of a 1990 FBI polygraph test that he failed.

The test was requested by independent counsel Lawrence E. Walsh as part of his investigation of the Iran-contra scandal, and most of the seven questions put to Gregg dealt with that affair. But one which he failed concerned his alleged involvement in the "October Surprise," a purported 1980 election-year plan to delay release of U.S. hostages being held in Iran until after the presidential vote that November.

Gregg's lawyer, Judah Best, declined to comment on the sealed court proceeding, which both Democratic and Republican sources said is aimed at preventing Walsh from disclosing the results of the FBI polygraph. House and Senate panels investigating the October Surprise stories are reportedly seeking the Gregg polygraph report.

Best confirmed, however, that Gregg's answer to the October Surprise question had been judged "lacking in candor" by the FBI agent conducting the polygraph. It was the only question on the FBI test that Best would discuss.

"The question he was asked was, 'Were you ever involved in a plan to delay the release of hostages in Iran until after the 1980 election?'" Best said in an interview last evening.

Gregg had been Bush's national security adviser from 1981 to 1988. He has been accused of being present at meetings where the October Surprise scheme was allegedly hatched to ensure Ronald Reagan's election.

Best said Gregg had no lawyer when he agreed to take the test on July 20, 1990, in the hope of ending Walsh's investigative interest in him. Best, whom Gregg retained shortly after the FBI test, criticized it as being too complex and using ambiguous words such as "involved."

The lawyer said he arranged for Gregg to take another polygraph four months later, which was administered by a private examiner and was less complex. Gregg passed this test, Best said.

The October Surprise question this time was: "While the 1980 hostages were still in Iran, did you then know of a plan to delay their release until after the election?"

Best said the private polygrapher, Richard O. Arther of New York City, concluded that Gregg was telling the truth in responding "no" to this and three questions about the Iran-contra scandal. Gregg, however, had to undergo testing on two days—Nov. 27 and 28—because, Best said, "he had difficulty dealing emotionally and otherwise" when the name of former White House aide Oliver L. North was included in one of the Iran-contra questions. North ran a secret resupply network out of the White House to support the Nicaraguan contras at a time Congress had barred U.S. military aid to the rebels.

"Whenever he [Gregg] was presented with the name of Lt. Col. Oliver North, the record starts to go off the chart," Best said. As a result, the polygrapher needed two days, "using the same questions, to make a determination as to truthfulness."

It is normal for polygraph examiners to question subjects several times when they show alarmed reactions to a particular query. Asked if Gregg had showed a similar reaction to North's name when it came up on the FBI test, Best said that was a good inference.

On the FBI test, Gregg was asked six other questions—five of them about the Iran-contra affair—but Best declined to disclose those questions or say how Gregg fared on them. Other sources said he flunked them all.

On the test by Arther, Gregg was asked three Iran-contra questions:

"1. While under oath [in previous testimony to Congress], did you deliberately tell even one lie about Felix Rodriguez [a longtime friend of Gregg who worked in North's secret network for the contras]?"

"2. Before Aug. 8, 1986, did George Bush and you discuss the sale of arms to Iran?"

"3. While under oath, did you deliberately tell one lie about Ollie North?"

Gregg answered no each time, and Arther concluded in his report: "Mr. Gregg is telling the truth."

Best said these questions covered the same subject matter as the FBI test, but were not identical.

The Aug. 8 date mentioned in one of the questions has significance for Gregg because, according to his past testimony, that was the day Rodriguez came to Washington

and voiced suspicions to Gregg of cheating in the secret military resupply network for the contras.

Gregg has testified that he never told Bush about Rodriguez's allegations until after the Iran-contra scandal became public on Nov. 26, 1986, when Attorney General Edwin Meese III announced that some of the profits from the secret arms sales to Iran had been diverted to the contra cause.

Best said he has supplied the results of the private test to Walsh's office and at the same time "informed them of my exasperation with this whole business of a war of polygraphs."

Walsh's office declined comment. Sources familiar with the inquiry said that Gregg remains a "subject" of the Walsh investigation, but he has not been called in for an interview since 1990.